

Message Text

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY RANGOON

AMEMBASSY SEOUL

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

USLO PEKING

S E C R E T STATE 204336

THE FOLLOWING TEL FROM BANGKOK DATED OCT 15, 73 TO
SECSTATE INFO CINCPAC SAIGON PHNOM PENH VIENTIANE
UDORN CHIANG MAI AND SONGKHLA IS REPTED:

QTE S E C R E T BANGKOK 16106

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, PINT, TH

SUBJECT: THAILAND GOVERNMENT CRISIS

1. TODAY BANGKOK PRESENTS PICTURE OF RELATIVE CALM AND QUIET
ALTHOUGH SOME INTERPRET IT TO BE THE CALM BEFORE THE
STORM. SCATTERED AND SPORADIC VIOLENCE, SUCH AS BURNING
MINOR POLICE POSTS CONTINUES TO BE REPORTED. WHILE MUCH OF
IT IS SMALL SCALE THERE HAVE BEEN SOME SERIOUS INCIDENTS,
MOST NOTABLY THE SIEGE OF THE METROPOLITAN POLICE HEADQUARTERS.

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2. THE NATIONAL STUDENT CENTER AND STUDENTS GENERALLY
THROUGHOUT BANGKOK APPEAR TO HAVE FINISHED WITH DEMONSTRATIONS
AND VIOLENCE AND THEY HAVE ACCEPTED THE GOVERNMENT'S
CONCESSIONS AND THE APPOINTMENT OF A NEW GOVERNMENT UNDER

JUDGE SANYA THAMMASAK. ON THE OTHER HAND SMALL MILITANT GROUPS WITH IMPORTANT NON-STUDENT PARTICIPATION APPEAR TO BE SEEKING OUT TARGETS WHICH REPRESENT THE ESTABLISHMENT AND ALSO ARTICULATING DEMANDS AIMED MOSTLY AT THE EXPULSION OF PRAPHAT, NARONG AND THANOM. THUS FAR OUR INFORMATION IS SKIMPY BUT REPORTS VARIOUSLY IDENTIFY THE MOVING FORCES OF THESE GROUPS AS INTELLECTUALS, PROFESSORS, COMMUNIST PARTY MEMBERS; THEIR RANK AND FILE MAY INCLUDE SAMLOR DRIVERS, WORKERS, THUGS, ETC. ONE IMPORTANT ELEMENT IN THIS COMPLEX IDENTIFIES ITSELF AS THE "REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL."

3. THE REMARKABLE AND UNNERVING CIRCUMSTANCE TODAY IS THE ALMOST TOTAL ABDICATION OF THE GOVERNMENT. ALL GOVERNMENT OFFICES ARE CLOSED FOR THREE DAYS. POLICE ARE NOWHERE TO BE SEEN AND WE UNDERSTAND THAT THEY, AS ONE OF THE PRIME TARGETS, HAVE BEEN TOLD THAT NO RESERVES ARE AVAILABLE AND THEIR TASK IS TO PROTECT THEIR OWN PREMISES. TRAFFIC THEREFORE FUNCTIONS AS IT CAN WITHOUT POLICE DIRECTION AND STUDENT VOLUNTEERS HAVE FILLED IN IN SOME PLACES. THE MILITARY LIKewise APPEAR TO HAVE LARGELY WASHED THEIR HANDS OF THE SITUATION ALTHOUGH IT IS PRESUMED THEY ARE PREPARED TO DEFEND THEIR OWN INSTALLATIONS.

4. THE FRAGILE NEW GOVERNMENT OF JUDGE SANYA SO FAR CONSISTS ONLY OF SANYA HIMSELF, CURRENTLY SET UP IN THE KING'S PALACE, AND FACING AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE. I TALKED BRIEFLY WITH THE PRIME MINISTER THIS MORNING ON THE TELEPHONE, OFFERING ASSISTANCE AND ELICITING HIS ASSESSMENT OF THE SITUATION. HE OBVIOUSLY FELT UNABLE TO SAY MUCH BUT GAVE ME A QUALIFIED AFFIRMATIVE REPLY WHEN I ASKED WHETHER HE WAS GETTING THE REQUISITE SUPPORT FROM THE SECURITY FORCES (WITHOUT WHOM IT IS HARD TO SEE HOW ORDER CAN BE RESTORED). WHILE THE POLICE APPEAR TO BE IN A STATE OF NEAR PARALYSIS, KRIS SIVARA APPEARS TO BE WORKING WITH SANYA AND THUS PROVIDES A LINK WITH THE RTA.

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5. AS NOTED, THE PRIME TARGET OF THE STUDENTS AND EVEN MORE OF THE MILITANTS IS PRAPHAT AND IT HAS BEEN HARD TO SEE ANY LASTING RESOLUTION BEING ACHIEVED WITH PRAPHAT CONTINUING TO PLAY ANY SIGNIFICANT ROLE. COLONEL NARONG RUNS PRAPHAT A CLOSE SECOND. MARSHAL THANOM, INITIALLY NOT MUCH ATTACKED, NOW TENDS TO BE LUMPED WITH THE TWO SINCE YESTERDAY'S KILLINGS. AT 1830 HOURS THAI RADIO CONFIRMED THAT ALL THREE HAVE LEFT THE COUNTRY. THIS SHOULD GREATLY IMPROVE THE PROSPECTS OF SANYA'S GOVERNMENT'S HOLDING POPULAR SUPPORT, ENLISTING SUPPORT OF THE SECURITY FORCES AND RESTORING ORDER.

6. THROUGHOUT LAST WEEK'S DEMONSTRATIONS THERE WAS ONLY LIMITED REFERENCE TO AMERICANS OR THE US. UNHAPPILY

NOW WE BEGIN TO HEAR MORE SPECIFIC DEMANDS THAT THE US MILITARY LEAVE THAILAND AND ACCUSATIONS THAT IT WAS ONLY US SUPPORT FOR THE MILITARY LEADERS WHICH ENABLED THEM TO HOLD SWAY FOR SO LONG. THIS MAY GROW.

7. A MAJOR COMPLICATION IS THE ALMOST TOTAL INACCESSIBILITY OF THE GREAT MAJORITY OF PEOPLE, GOVERNMENTAL AND OTHERS, WHO ARE CUSTOMARILY OUR PRIME SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND CHANNELS FOR WHATEVER INFLUENCE WE MAY WISH TO BRING TO BEAR. I HAD BEEN IN THE MIDST OF FAREWELL CALLS, VIRTUALLY ALL OF WHICH HAVE NOW BEEN CANCELLED. SATURDAY, IRONICALLY, I WAS TO MEET WITH JUDGE SANYA AND OUR LIMITED TELEPHONE CONVERSATION THIS MORNING MAY BE ALL THAT I WILL HAVE BEFORE DEPARTURE. I HAVE BEEN GRANTED A FAREWELL AUDIENCE BY HIS MAJESTY THURSDAY MORNING AND HOPE VERY MUCH THAT THAT WILL STAND. I DID REACH MARSHAL DAWEE THIS EVENING BUT LEARNED LITTLE.

8. UNDOUBTEDLY PEOPLE WHO KNOW THAILAND ARE ASKING HOW COULD IT HAPPEN HERE? YESTERDAY'S KILLING AND VIOLENCE IS VERY UN-THAI BUT A REVIEW OF EVENTS OVER THE LAST SEVERAL YEARS, FULLER ACCOUNTS OF WHICH ARE AVAILABLE FROM THIS MISSION'S REPORTING, DO REVEAL AN UNHAPPY EVOLUTION WHICH PROBABLY STARTED IN THE NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COUNCIL'S NOVEMBER 17, 1971 DISSOLVING OF THE PARLIAMENT AND ABOLITION OF THE CONSTITUTION AND CABINET. PRIOR TO THAT THAILAND HAD LIVED UNDER MANY YEARS OF MILITARY RULE BUT ALWAYS WITH A CONSTITUTION IN SIGHT.

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IN 1969 THE CONSTITUTION, ELECTIONS, ETC. WERE AT LAST REALIZED. THIS WAS A THAILAND UNLIKE THE EARLIER DECADES, NOW THE INFORMED PUBLIC WAS LOOKING FOR BOTH BETTER AND MORE EFFECTIVE GOVERNMENT AND ALSO SOME KIND OF REPRESENTATION AND THE ORDER AND PROTECTION PROVIDED BY A CONSTITUTION TO HAVE THIS ALL THROWN 975 8, 1971 QUITE ARBITRARILY, WHILE IT PROVOKED NOT MUCH OVERT REACTION AT THE TIME, HAS HAD ITS MOUNTING CNSEQUENCES, MOST NOTABLE IN THE STUDENT DEMANDS FOR EARLY ENACTMENT OF A NEW CONSTITUTION LAST JUNE.

9. ANOTHER STUDENT TARGET LAST SUMMER WAS THE US MILITARY PRESENCE IN THAILAND, A NATURAL FOCUS FOR NATIONALIST-MINDED YOUNG LIBERALS, PARTICULARLY GIVEN THEIR TENDENCY TO FEEL THAT US SUPPORT IS AT LEAST PARTLY RESPONSIBLE FOR CONTINUED RULE BY THE MILITARY LEADERSHIP. FORTUNATELY THIS GROWING ISSUE WAS SOMEWHAT STERILIZED BY OUR MODEST REDUCTION OF LATE AUGUST AND SEPTEMBER AND THEREFORE UNTIL JUST ABOUT NOW WE HAVE NOT BEEN A TARGET OF THE CURRENT MOUNTING AGITATION.

10. GOVERNMENT LEADERS AND PARTICULARLY PRAPHAT WERE AWARE OF AND FEARED MOUNTING STUDENT PRESSURE FOR EARLY ENACTMENT OF A CONSTITUTION, AND THE IMMEDIATE CAUSE OF THE CURRENT

CRISIS WAS THEIR PRECLUSIVE ACTION IN DETAINING 13 WHOM THEY PARTICULARLY IDENTIFIED WITH THE PLANS FOR MILITANT STUDENT ACTIONS LATER THIS YEAR. THE CONSEQUENCE OF THESE ARRESTS ARE WELL KNOWN AND UNFORTUNATELY THEY INCLUDE THE PREDICTABLE RESULT OF PLAYING INTO THE HANDS OF EXTREMIST WHO HAVE EXPLOITED AND EXPANDED THE MODERATE STUDENTS DEMANDS THROUGH THE PRECIPITATION YESTERDAY OF WIDESPREAD VIOLENCE RESULTING IN THE RESIGNATION OF THANOM'S GOVERNMENT.

11. IF PRIME MINISTER SANYA RECEIVES THE LOYAL COOPERATION FROM THAILAND'S SECURITY FORCES IT SHOULD BE POSSIBLE TO RESTORE ORDER FAIRLY PROMPTLY AND GET ON WITH THE BUSINESS OF APPOINTING A FULL NEW GOVERNMENT AND DEVELOPING A NEW PROGRAM. MY EXPECTATION IS THAT SUCH A GOVERNMENT WOULD BE ONE LARGELY OF TECHNICIANS WITH A PRIMARILY CARETAKER ROLE PENDING ENACTMENT OF THE CONSTITUTION AND ELECTIONS SIX MONTHS HENCE. SUCH A GOVERNMENT WOULD PROBABLY CONTINUE
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TO PRESS US FOR A DISCUSSION OF MILITARY REDUCTIONS BUT WOULD NOT BE HOSTILE TO OUR CONTINUED PRESENCE AT SOME LEVEL OR SEEK TO UNDERMINE THE SUBSTANTIAL EXISTING THAI-US COOPERATION. THIS MAY NEED REASSESSMENT IF, AS RUMORED, THANAT IS APPOINTED FOREIGN MINISTER. THE QUESTION REMAINS HOWEVER WHETHER THE FORMER MILITARY LEADERSHIP, ACCUSTOMED TO POWER AND ALL ITS PERKS AND ALSO SINCERELY CONCERNED ABOUT THAILAND'S SECURITY, WOULD ACCEPT BEING EXCLUDED FROM THE TOP COUNCILS OR AT BEST SHARING POWER IN AN UNEASY RELATIONSHIP WITH OFTEN UNCONGENIAL CIVILIANS. PRAPHAT'S DEPARTURE, HOWEVER, MAKES SUCH ACCEPTANCE MORE PROBABLE.

12. IF THE POLICE AND THE MILITARY, CONTINUE TO ABDICATE THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES THE SANYA GOVERNMENT WILL FALTER AND COULD EVEN COLLAPSE, MAKING WAY FOR A RADICAL LEADERSHIP IN WHICH THE EXTREMISTS NOW CONTINUING THE DISTURBANCES WOULD PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE, EVEN THOUGH THEY WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY PUT FORWARD MORE RESPECTABLE FIGURES AS LEADERS. SUCH AN EVENTUALITY HOWEVER SEEMS FAIRLY UNTHINKABLE IN THAILAND TODAY AND IF IT REALLY THREATENS I WOULD EXPECT THE POLICE AND MILITARY TO MOVE IN AND TAKE OVER BY FORCE. THIS WOULD INDEED BE A BLOODY CONTEST IN WHICH MODERATES WOULD BE PUSHED ASIDE AND THE RESULTING MILITARY RULE MIGHT WELL BE WITHOUT MANY BENIGN CHARACTERISTICS IT EXHIBITED IN THE PAST.

13. IF SANYA GOES, THEN A NEW AND SER

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